



A Future Fit for Wales

a shorter working
week for all

(Key findings and messages)

February 2022



Autonomy is an independent think tank that provides necessary analyses, proposals and solutions with which to confront the changing reality of work today. Our aim is to promote real freedom, equality and human flourishing above all. To find out more about our research and work, visit

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A Future Fit For Wales: a shorter working week for all

(Key findings and messages)

The shorter working week is a 'multi-dividend' policy that speaks to a number of economic, environmental and social challenges that Wales faces.

This report advocates a three-pronged strategy to achieve it. In brief:

1. *Trial shorter working hours in parts of the **public sector**.*
2. *Encourage and support **private sector** firms to transition to shorter hours.*
3. *Collaborate with and empower **trade unions** so they can negotiate shorter hours across diverse workplaces.*

More detail:

1. **Investment in a public-sector trial is recommended, with the view to adoption longer-term.**

A four-day week in the Welsh public sector would:

- Potentially create **37,859** jobs in Wales.
- Cost around **£1 billion**.
 - This amounts to **10.5% of the public sector salary bill**.
- Amount to around **2.5% of Wales' overall public sector spending**.
 - It would be roughly 0.1% of the UK's annual public spending budget.
- Be particularly impactful in Wales.
 - Among Welsh NHS staff, sick absences are particularly high amongst UK nations.

2. **Encourage working time best practice in the private sector.**

- **Use public sector procurement strategies** - in line with the Fair Work Commissions and the Well-being of Future Generations Act - to encourage working time reduction with private sector partners.
- **Set up a Working Time Committee** in order to bring trade unions, politicians and businesses together to work towards the goal of shorter working weeks.
- Autonomy's study shows that **the majority of medium and large Welsh firms can afford to move to shorter working hours in the long term**.

3. Strengthen worker voice in the workplace to allow for more effective collective bargaining on the issue of working time.

- *Trade unions have historically led the charge for working time reduction: it was due to trade union activity after World War Two that the weekend was standardised across the UK.*
- ***Trade unions need to be central to the conversation in Wales.***

Our polling demonstrates a large appetite for working time reduction in Wales:

- **76%** *of the Welsh public* would support the sharing out of work so that everyone can have a good work-life balance.
- **57%** *of the Welsh public* would support the Welsh government piloting a scheme to move towards a four day working week.
- **62%** *of the Welsh public* would ideally choose to work a four day working week or less.